

**Title: Georgia 4-H Serves as a Lead State Advisor to National 4-H Tech Changemakers Project**

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**Summary:** Through a partnership with National 4-H Council and Microsoft Cooperation, Georgia 4-H was invited to serve as the Lead State Advisor on the 4-H Tech Changemakers project.

**Situation:** There are 23.4 million people in the United States who lack broadband internet access (Federal Communications Commission, 2019). While access and affordability are a concern, for true digital inclusion, communities must adopt and use these technological services. This leads to overall community economic development and vitality. Sparse populations, weak infrastructure, net neutrality infringement, and topography challenges are some of the many reasons internet providers refuse to service rural America.

An increasing body of research indicates that if broadband access is expanded in rural areas and the average community member does not possess digital literacy skills, they will likely not purchase and utilize the service. Therefore, internet service providers have little to no incentive to expand their coverage areas. The digital inclusion pathway commonly includes three barriers: (a) readiness - in which the user lacks basic computer skills; (b) taste - in which the user lacks confidence, need or desire to use a computer; and (c) access - in which the user lacks access to computers, (Reder, 2015). Perhaps now more than ever, a COVID-19 world shows the importance of connectivity for the workforce population, youth education, healthcare, and e-commerce.

**Response:** In 2021-22, a coalition of impact makers – Land O’Lakes, Microsoft, Tractor Supply Company and Verizon committed to creating greater digital inclusion for rural Americans through the 4-H Tech Changemakers program. Together, they sought to: (a) educate 35,000 rural Americans with digital skills with a particular focus on engaging black and brown communities where the digital divide is the greatest, (b) elevate the story to bring greater visibility and thought leadership to stakeholders at the national and local levels, and (c) establish greater program sustainability through turnkey training resources, greater program accessibility and a groundswell of support across 4-H.

The University of Georgia Extension/Georgia 4-H along with North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University serve as the lead state advisor of the project. The 4-H Tech Changemakers project uses an adult-youth partnership model to empowers teens as teachers of digital literacy in areas with a lack of broadband Internet access. The 4-H teen leaders work cooperatively with adult Extension/4-H staff members and volunteers to plan, implement, and evaluate needs-driven educational programming in their local communities. The University of Georgia Extension/Georgia 4-H directly mentioned 10 institutions including Arizona State University, University of Arkansas, Auburn University, Purdue University, University of California, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Texas A&M University, Washington State University, West Virginia University, and University of Wisconsin.

**Results/Impact:** For this grant cycle, twenty-three land-grant institutions offered 4-H Tech Changemakers programming. Over 325 teens were trained to deliver digital skills, reaching 36,718 adult participants. Nearly 48% of the adult learners identified as a person of color. Of the teens involved in the project, 86% said that the 4-H Tech Changemakers Program inspired them to help their community, 94% indicated that the 4-H Tech Changemakers Program is a place where you learn about ways to help your community, and 94% agreed that they learned new technology skills by participating in the program. One youth commented, “through the 4-H Tech Changemakers program, I learned that technology can give people more job options.” From the adult participants that completed the program evaluation, 96% agreed or strongly agreed they learned new technology skills, 97% agreed or strongly agreed the teens teaching were knowledgeable about the content for the session, 96% would recommend the session to someone else, and 97% indicated they learned ways technology can help them in work and/or life.



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The University of Georgia 4-H program is the largest youth leadership organization in the state.

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